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Reading Aloud in Britain Today (RABiT)

Discussion, reflection and next steps for Teachers and Trainee Teachers

Reading Aloud in Britain Today (RABiT) is a two-year project researching whether, what, where, how and why adults read aloud. Findings so far tell us that most adults read *something* out loud (and listen to others reading) at least *sometimes*. Very few people never do this. What we read aloud is diverse, including newspapers, social media, books, religious texts, graffiti, recipes, poems, instructions, posters, children's books and crossword clues. Our reasons are equally diverse, including to share, entertain, inform, help, be together, worship, enjoy, memorize, learn, understand and write. Some people read to other adults, some to children, some to pets and some people read aloud when completely alone. Some of this reading we notice; some we may do regularly but rarely notice. Some people read out loud in different languages, including languages we may not use in conversation with others. Forms of reading aloud are important in many workplaces, as well as within family and community relationships, for learning and as part of religious practice.

Points for reflection and action based on a discussion with teachers and trainee teachers at the Nottingham Institute of Education, Nottingham Trent University, 5th of March 2019

Thoughts and questions, as readers

- Is reading aloud ultimately an expression of love? Parental love? Companionship? Support? Self-love?
- Reading aloud in different tones and voices changes the experience, for both reader(s) and listener(s).
- If reading aloud is slower in our heads, does that allow for greater resonance and better depth of meaning?
- Reading aloud is so diverse and we often find ourselves reading aloud without realising it. For example, reading an interesting news article out loud.
- Are we embarrassed to admit that we enjoy listening to stories read to us because the practice is associated with children?
- Reading aloud, and listening to others, can form an emotional connection, related to the physicality and intimacy of the voice, of being together, and also perhaps to do with memory and 'heightened senses'.
- At what age do we decide we do or don't enjoy reading aloud, and what causes this? Is it to do with confidence, experience, personal preference or something else?
- We can see the voice as a mode of multimodal communication, expressing a range of emotions to add to what is being communicated with the written words.

Thoughts and questions, as teachers

- Reading their own compositions out loud can help learners 'fine-tune' and develop their writing, finding errors and editing.
- To what extent does *how* we read aloud to learners impact on their understanding of characters and text more broadly?
- When thinking about working with learners with different needs and learning difficulties, we need to remember how individual this is. Some people may not want to read aloud at all but may value listening to others; some may find reading aloud a useful tool to develop their reading; some may want to read aloud but only after having had time to practice reading alone; some may prefer to read aloud in unison with others; and some may not want to read aloud or listen to others at all.
- For some learners, reading aloud may be a good way to practice using and hearing their voices 'in public.'
- Are we as teachers silencing readers? Are we forgetting the (potential) joys and possibilities of oral/aural reading through an emphasis on silent, individual reading?
- Reading aloud can be an important tool in any classroom to develop reading skills and confidences but, more than this, to get learners thinking through things together, as groups, in fellowship.
- Reading aloud isn't the only way to develop love of language and reading. Storytelling is also a powerful and engaging tool.
- We need to remember 'voice:' our human voices are related to individual, family, community, linguistic and cultural identities. We need to ensure that we are using and celebrating a variety of voices in the classroom.

What do you think?

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Sam Duncan, April 2019